

6. Forfar Landscape Capacity Study

6.1 Landscape Assessment

Natural Heritage Zone (SNH 2002):
Eastern Lowlands

Regional Landscape Character Type (LUC 1997):
Broad Valley Lowland
Low Moorland Hills

Landscape Character Unit (LUC 1997):
Strathmore
Forfar Hills

6.1.1 Landscape Character Assessment

The landscape and visual analysis is shown on figure 6.1.

Forfar is located within the Strathmore Landscape Character Unit of the Broad Valley Lowland Landscape Character Type of the Tayside Landscape Character Assessment.

From a distance, Strathmore appears as a very broad, flat-bottomed valley enclosed by the Highland Foothills to the north and the rising sweep of the Sidlaws' north-facing dip slope to the south. Where estate planting survived, for example around Glamis, the strath landscape is rich and textured and particularly colourful during spring and autumn. Rectilinear fields are typically bounded by hedges and less typically drystone dykes. These were commonly associated with field boundary trees. Unfortunately many of these features have fallen into disrepair and/or been lost due to agricultural improvements since the 1950's. Where trees have been lost, the landscape appears open and expansive with rectangular fields punctuated by a scatter of large farmsteads.

6.1.2 Landscape Setting

Forfar lies on the floor of the Strathmore valley east of the main south-west/northeast axis of Strathmore. The town is flanked by Low Moorland Hills to the north, east and south. In particular to the south Balmashanner Hill (174m) and the war memorial are prominent to the setting of Forfar and together with the Hill of Lour (232m) to the south and Lownie Hill (204m) to the east create a distinct backdrop to views of the town from the north and west.

The western edge of town is marked by Forfar Loch, with the A90(T) immediately beyond. To the west of Forfar the landscape is typical of Strathmore, with large rectangular fields and higher quality arable land. In contrast, to the east, the landscape is strongly characterised by glacial moraines, with small-scale and often complex rolling topography. The rolling terrain becomes more pronounced between the B9128 and the A932. Field sizes are smaller and less regular, with pasture where topography is most complex. This area relates more strongly to the Lunan Valley to the east than to Strathmore.

The Moorland Hills are close to the edge of town on the south and east. The poorer nature of the soils is reflected in the pattern of agriculture with arable on some of the lower slopes giving way to enclosed pastures and eventually in the more poorly drained areas, to rough moorland grazing. On lower slopes, this landscape type shares the structure of hedgerows and hedgerow trees of Strathmore, with dykes and post and wire fencing bounding fields on higher ground.

The prosperity of farming in Strathmore has restricted woodland in the landscape around Forfar to policy woodlands to the north at Carse Gray; public plantings at Balmashanner Hill and around Forfar Loch; and woodland which has occurred through natural regeneration on derelict quarries on the north face of Balmashanner Hill. It is notable that all woodland is either located on the Low Moorland Hills or the unproductive recreational land around Forfar Loch. However, woodland is found in other parts of Strathmore on otherwise agriculturally productive land as either policy woodland or rectilinear plantation shelterbelts.

Forfar Loch Country Park adjacent to the western edge of the burgh is significant to the landscape setting of the town. It provides an attractive loch-side landscape for informal recreation. The Forfar Loch Country Park is highly valued for its natural and recreational landscape qualities and their direct accessibility from the centre of town.

Balmashanner Hill and its associated path network are similarly used for informal recreation and equally seen as a signature landmark for the burgh. The path network creates easy access to the spectacular panoramic views from the hill over Forfar towards the Angus Glens. The birds eye view of the urban area in the foreground adds to the drama of these distant panoramic scenery. A plan showing the Landscape and Visual Analysis is included as figure 6.1.

6.1.3 Settlement Form and Pattern

Whilst there is evidence of prehistoric settlement, Forfar has grown as a settlement around a castle which is believed to have been sited on Castle Hill in the twelfth century or earlier, to the east of Castle Street. This location was strategically important during the medieval period when it was an important land bridge across an otherwise boggy region. Forfar was a major crossroads on the "King's Highway" between Perth and Aberdeen.

Significant drainage of Forfar Loch appears to have commenced during the seventeenth century. The castle and the burgh were at that time partly encircled by Forfar Loch which formerly extended across the north of Castle Hill and East High Street. By the nineteenth century, Forfar Loch no longer extended across the north of the burgh but marked the western side of Forfar as it does today.

The medieval core of the burgh developed south of the castle along Castle Street, and East High Street and West High Street which are still visible today

From the late eighteenth century onwards Forfar has significantly expanded to its current size. Initially development occurred along radial roads with infilling between these roads taking place later. As Forfar expanded after the nineteenth century, Gallowhill to the north-east and Newmonthill to the south-east have been subsumed into the urban area leaving the larger hills of Balmashanner, Lour and Lownie (see 6.1.1) undeveloped, defining the setting and landscape backdrop of the town.

During the twentieth century, Forfar has expanded in all directions creating a number of suburbs outside the central core.

Topographically Forfar is largely contained within a shallow bowl to the north-west through east to south east. Trees and shrubs, together with the embankment of the disused railway further delineate parts of the northern

boundary and particularly, the eastern boundary. The pronounced rolling glacial moraine described in section 6.1.2 has effectively provided a topographical boundary to the eastern edge of Forfar. These features have created a strong sense of urban containment in these directions. To the south, south west and west, there is less of a distinct topographical stop point for the settlement. However the recent development on the higher ground to the south and south-west is unduly prominent in the landscape and contributes towards an impression of urban sprawl.

The open space and recreational landscapes on the hills and on the periphery of the burgh create a strong contrast between the built up area and the rural landscape around it.

6.2 Visual Assessment

Refer to figure 6.2 for key to photographs.

6.2.1 Views Out or Across Settlement

The generally low-lying location of Forfar tends to limit views from Forfar itself. However, houses on the western fringe of Forfar together with some houses within residential areas on the higher ground to the south of Forfar, enjoy distant, sometimes panoramic views north towards the Angus Glens. More locally, some houses close to Forfar Loch Country Park enjoy views over the Loch and towards Balmashanner Hill.

Of greater community importance are views from key public places. These are shown on figure 6.1. Views from Reid Park and Newmonthill Cemetery are important but extensive tree cover limits views of the urban edge of Forfar, particularly when trees are in leaf (see photos 6.1 and 6.2). Of greater significance are views from Balmashanner Hill and its associated path network, where extensive panoramic views over Forfar and north towards the Angus Glens are often possible (see photos 6.3 - 6.6).

6.2.2 Views of Settlement

Due to the topography around Forfar views of the burgh from the wider landscape are restricted to those from the southwest through west to northwest. Views of Forfar from these directions can be gained from considerable distances, as far away as the foothills of the Angus Glens to the northwest. Principal views of Forfar are however those from public roads around Kirriemuir (6km to the northwest). (See figure 6.2 and photos 6.7 and 6.8). Views of Forfar from the A90(T) are often brief and to the oblique to the direction of travel. Southbound views of Forfar are initially restricted by intervening landform to the north of Forfar Loch. The Balmashanner Monument is sometimes visible with the agricultural fields on its northern slopes, but most of Forfar remains out of view within the shallow topographic bowl. Travelling northwards, woodland south of the A929 restricts views of Forfar. Tree and woodland planting at the western end of Forfar Loch further restricts views when travelling in both directions. Development within Orchardbank Business Park is briefly prominent when passing in both directions, but woodland planting will provide screening in the future.

6.2.3 Approaches

Approach from A90(T) via A926 (Kirriemuir Road)

When approaching Forfar from the Kirriemuir junction, views of Forfar are limited due to the shoulder of higher ground running south-west, north-east across Garth and Turfbeg farms. Recent housing development at Turfbeg extends onto the higher ground with straight development edges unsympathetic to the land form. Despite the open nature of the landscape and the close proximity of Forfar, the A926 approach to Forfar has a strong countryside character with a strong visual edge. (See photo 6.9).

Approach from A90(T) via A929 (Glamis Road)

Whilst views southward across agricultural areas are restricted due to roadside trees, the Orchardbank Business Park, almost up to the A90(T) on the north side quickly gives an urban character to this approach. The trees to the south of Glamis Road assisted by gently rising topography bound the urban area to the north of Glamis Road, forming a strong visual edge. However, the sense of arrival is somewhat confused as it is unclear whether the urban area is entered at Little Mill Nursery or further east at Westfield Loan, after which development occurs on both sides of Glamis Road. (See photo 6.10).

Approach from A90(T) A932 (Dundee Road)

Views of Forfar open up dramatically as you turn the sharp bend at Duff's Corner, north of the track to Halkerton. The western edge of Forfar is visible from this point. Views of the western edge of Forfar are partially broken by lines of conifers along field boundaries. Views of the urban edge become less obstructed as one approaches the urban area.

Towards the northern part of this boundary, Westfield and its associated woodlands, provides a more organic appearance to the urban edge. Further south, the urban edge is more abrupt. The housing layout, whilst modern and insular in design, has frontages which are over-looking the adjacent countryside helping the urban area relate to the wider landscape. The retention of parts of an old Hawthorn hedge on the west side of the road has further helped softening the boundary. These sections of hedge have more recently been managed at a higher height increasing its beneficial effects. However south of around halfway between Slatefield Place and Slatefield Gardens, the boundary on the west side of Westfield Loan is formed by a stone wall, which leaves a more open frontage from the urban area. The strength of the urban edge varies from strong around Westfield to weak where it meets Dundee Road, with moderate in between (see photos 6.11 & 6.12).

Approach from South-East via C56 (Lour Road)

The topography and woodland together effectively prevent views of the south of Forfar from this direction until it is entered north of the track to Balmashanner Hill. The topography combined with woodlands and mature trees within the gardens of the houses give this part of Forfar a strong visual edge. This will be further enhanced in time by the young woodland planted around the land reserved for the cemetery extension on the north eastern side of Lour Road (see photo 6.13).

Approach from South-East via B9128 (South Street)

Views of Forfar are not gained from this direction until you turn the corner at the Welton. The edge of the burgh is only partially visible due to the rolling topography between this corner and the southern edge of the town. Whilst trees and shrubs would enhance the southern edge seen from this approach, the topography gives it a moderate visual strength (see photo 6.14).

Approach from East via A932 (Arbroath Road)

No views of Forfar are gained until you pass the disused railway embankment. After this point the north side of the road becomes increasingly urban in character but is not balanced by development to the south where the topography is strongly undulating. The absence of a discernable entry point to the settlement is a weakness. Nevertheless, the sympathetic development pattern in relation to the landform gives this urban edge moderate visual strength (see photo 6.15).

Approach from East via B9113 (Montrose Road)

Again, views are gained of Forfar only after the embankment of the disused railway is passed. There is no clear entry point to Forfar from this direction. The character on the Forfar side of the disused railway is neither urban nor rural in character, which gives an untidy appearance. Consequently, the edge of Forfar from this approach is of weak visual strength (see photo 6.16).

Approach from North-East via 89134 (Lunanhead Road)

Whilst occasional views of Forfar are gained from north east of Lunanhead, the location of Forfar within a topographical bowl-shape, together with trees and shrubs in the landscape prevents significant views of the urban area until it is entered. This is a moderately strong visual edge (see photo 6.17).

Approach from North-East via U368 (Suttieside Road)

The housing at Whitehills is visible to the south on this approach. The trees and shrubs to the north of Ivy Road contribute towards this boundary being of moderate visual strength. Nevertheless this approach creates a strong impression of a village environment due to the visual separation of the older housing at Suttieside from that at Whitehills, Forfar by agricultural land (see photo 6.18).

Approach from North via B9128 (Brechin Road)

Despite relatively open countryside, the urban mass of Forfar is not visible. Due to the topographical bowl-shape, Forfar lies beyond the line of vision, which is accentuated by the rise in the road to cross the former railway south of North Mains farm. Whilst there are assorted agricultural and industrial buildings visible around North Mains and Suttieside, their scattered appearance together with their pseudo-agricultural style does not promote an urban character. Views of the rear of assorted developments and associated storage yards along Kirriemuir Road are not attractive. However the visual isolation of this group from Forfar does not suggest the existence of the significant urban area beyond. There is a sudden change in character from rural to urban upon crossing the bridge. The topography gives Forfar a moderately strong visual edge when viewed from this direction (see photo 6.19).

6.3 Detailed Analysis of Directions of Growth

Refer to figure 6.3 for key to directions analysed below.

6.3.1 South-West (between A929 Glamis Road and A932 Dundee Road)

To the south-west of Forfar the land gently and evenly slopes upwards from north-west to south-east. South of the green agricultural shed (at around 90m AOD) the gradient steepens to a short east west ridge upon which the Halkerton is located. South of Halkerton, to the junction of the A90(T) junction, the land is relatively flat. Closer to the A90(T), the gradient starts to steepen at around 85m AOD. On the Forfar edge at Slatefield, the

steepening is more gradual starting eastwards of Old Halkerton Road, becoming steeper east of Dundee Road.

The Halfpenny Burn zigzags down the slope towards Forfar Loch. The highly modified watercourse had been straightened during the nineteenth century. The high quality agricultural land led to medium sized rectilinear fields, which become irregular where they abut the Halfpenny Burn. Most of the nineteenth century field layout exists today, but some field boundaries have been lost as fields were amalgamated. Alongside the A90(T) there is woodland, particularly on the steeper ground, with planting closer to Little Mill Nursery being more recent. Many of the fields have lines of broadleaved and conifers trees planted along their boundaries with the slope to provide shelter. On the lower ground there are some hedges and trees.

The south-west of Forfar stops at Westfield Loan following the line of an historic road. Towards the northern part of this boundary, Westfield and its associated woodlands, provide a more defined appearance to the urban edge. Further south, the urban edge is more abrupt. The housing layout, whilst modern and insular in design, the layout has frontages over-looking the adjacent countryside, helping the urban area relate to the wider landscape. The retention of parts of an old Hawthorn hedge on the west side of the road has further helped soften the boundary. These sections of hedge have more recently been managed at a higher height than at the time of the Capacity Study from 2003 increasing the softening of the boundary.

There is around 60m difference of elevation between the northern and southern end of this potential direction of growth. Overall, the lower part of the area adjacent to Glamis Road is of low visual sensitivity. Above around 90m AOD, visual sensitivity is higher due a combination of elevation and steepening slopes. These areas are more commonly visible in views from the north-west and north.

Views from the path network on Balmashanner Hill across the area towards the Angus Glens are highly scenic. Similarly, the view from the bend at Duff's Corner on the A932 near Halkerton across Strathmore has been used in national calendars. Therefore, the steeper and higher ground above 90m AOD also has greater landscape value.

Based on the above, it is considered that there is high capacity for urban expansion on the lower ground below 90m AOD. The existing trees and hedges further assist the landscape to absorb development. The rectilinear field pattern provides a strong landscape structure to which development can relate. A rectilinear street layout would relate best to the grain of the wider landscape. It would be appropriate that the Halfpenny Burn be preserved as a green corridor and integrated as part of a wider green network linking Forfar Loch with the network of woodlands on Balmashanner Hill. The Burn could be positively incorporated into any eventual layout, becoming a recreational and landscape feature of the urban area. Connectivity to the existing urban area would principally be via Glamis Road and Old Halkerton Road, with other minor routes also having access potential.

However, it would be undesirable if built development was to encroach close to the A90(T) as this would potentially create an image of urban sprawl.

6.3.2 North-West (between Forfar Loch and A926 Kirriemuir Road)

To the north of Forfar Loch Country Park is a low rounded shoulder of land, the ridge of which follows a line broadly parallel with the Loch between Garth and Forfar Academy via the former site of Turfbeg. This shoulder of land provides the northern edge of the bowl within which Forfar is located.

During the twentieth century, housing development has progressively developed east to west along the southern slopes of the shoulder, with the

urban area extending just short of or onto the ridge. Most of the land to the north of Forfar Loch however remains as agriculture and this is particularly important to the setting of the Country Park. This area south of the shoulder is of high landscape value and visual sensitivity.

The high quality agricultural land has led to medium sized rectilinear fields. The structure of the field pattern was established by the nineteenth century, but in this area many field boundaries have been lost as fields were amalgamated. There are generally no trees or hedges. This has led to an open landscape, with the simple topography providing most of the landscape structure. The eroded landscape character therefore has substantially reduced capacity to absorb urban development west of Turfbeg.

The full shoulder of land is highly visible from the path network on Balmashanner Hill. An urban extension westward on the shoulder (north or south of the ridge) would be disproportionately prominent and would visually subsume Forfar Loch into the urban area.

Given all the above, it is considered that there is no capacity for urban extension west of Turfbeg. It is not considered that mitigation would be capable of over-coming much of the above capacity considerations.

From the north and north-west, Forfar is set within a shallow bowl which is defined by the shoulder of higher ground. Whilst housing is visible on top of the edge of the bowl, (particularly at Turfbeg) the strong impression remains that Forfar is over the hill to the south. The Millennium Forest woodlands to the west of Forfar Academy are now supplementing older landscaping and provide a landscape structure to this area.

The area of land to the north of Turfbeg is bounded by the Kirriemuir Road to the north; by the Millennium Forest to the east, and housing to the south. This provides a level of visual containment of any future development. This would however involve breaching the ridge and developing west of the Millennium Forest.

If an urban extension is considered for this area, it would be desirable that built development does not extend fully to the Kirriemuir Road, retaining public open space and woodland to define and soften the northern edge. The inclusion of new blocks of woodland on the western edge combined with native hedges would further assist in creating landscape structure to soften and frame the development. Groups of trees outwith gardens close to the ridge would visually break up the built up area when viewed from Balmashanner Hill and the urbanised ridge from the north-west and north. Opportunities to connect this area to the existing settlement would be limited to the currently unconstructed track at Turfbeg. Access constraints may lead to vehicular access via Kirriemuir Road, outside the settlement rather than from the urban area. Given the above, capacity for urban extension north of Turfbeg is considered to be medium.

6.3.3 North (between B9128 Brechin Road and Old Brechin Road B9134)

To the east of Forfar Academy, the higher ground continues eastwards, but is less pronounced. Nevertheless, there remains a sense that Forfar lies south of the higher ground. Employment development has spilled northwards onto the former railway sidings to meet the historic line of houses at Suttieside. Whilst assorted agricultural and industrial buildings are visible around North Mains and Suttieside, their scattered appearance together with their pseudo-agricultural style does not appear as part of Forfar which is perceived as over the hill.

Further to the east, the cutting which is part of the former railway bounds the built up area. This provides a high level of containment to the urban area. Again, beyond the line of the railway, the landscape is open in

character with larger arable fields with no network of trees, hedges or topography to provide a landscape structure to contain or help absorb built development. An urban extension in this direction would require extensive mitigation in the form of structural tree and woodland planting.

Even with extensive mitigation, development would extend Forfar onto north-facing slopes and beyond the line of the former railway. This would be a substantial change in how Forfar relates to the landscape. Accordingly, it is considered that there is low capacity for urban extension to the north of Forfar.

6.3.4 North-East (B9134 Old Brechin Road Road and A932 Arbroath Road)

The eastern part of Forfar is built on the rolling glacial moraine. This extends eastwards of the settlement. Agricultural land therefore tends to be relatively poor and is predominantly pasture, with smaller and less regular fields.

The line of the former railway encircles this part of Forfar. The most visible remnant is the railway embankment, which encloses a series of wedge shaped areas of land which radiate outwards from the town centre. The most northerly wedge, between the B9134 and the B9113, is currently being developed as housing. Beyond the railway embankment, the topography is more even. The landscape is open in character with larger arable fields and no network of trees, hedges or topography to provide a landscape structure to contain or help absorb built development. An urban extension in this direction would require extensive mitigation and structural landscape planting to form an acceptable transition with the existing open landscape character.

The smaller more southern area between the B9113 and the A932 is within the existing development boundary. To the east of this southern area lies Lochhead Landfill Site which removes the possibility of urban extension beyond the railway.

In both cases, the line of the former railway forms a strong visual edge and containment of the urban area. Extension east of the more northern wedge would remove what is at present a strong and coherent boundary and create imbalanced entrances along both the B9134 and the B9113. Accordingly, it is considered that there is low capacity for urban extension in this direction.

6.3.5 South-East (between A932 Arbroath Road and C56 Lour Road)

The eastern part of Forfar is built on the rolling glacial moraine with extensive sand and gravel mineral deposits. This extends eastwards of the settlement. Agricultural land therefore tends to be relatively poor and is predominantly pasture, with smaller and less regular fields.

The landscape immediately adjacent to the urban area north of the B9128 and Arbroath Road has the most dramatic moraine topography around Forfar. The mounds are steep sided and visually complex. This geomorphology is the dominant element of the landscape character. This area has a high level of landscape character sensitivity. Developing this landscape would erase these distinct landforms and remove the landscape character. Also, the rolling moraine provides a high level of containment to the settlement.

South of the B9128 the topography is less dramatic, but still provides a high level of containment to the urban edge. Beyond this, the landscape is more open and even as the ground steepens on the north-east flank of Balmashanner Hill. Development in this direction would start to impinge upon views from the paths leading to the Hill from King's Road. This area would therefore have high levels of visual sensitivity and landscape value.

Given the above, it is considered that there is no capacity for urban extension to the south-east of Forfar.

6.3.6 South (between C56 Lour Road and A932 Dundee Road)

The steep northern face of Balmashanner Hill reaches a height of 174m AOD. The northern and north-western slopes of Balmashanner Hill in particular are important to the setting of Forfar and its relationship to the Balmashanner Monument. A series of fields radiate from the summit with the long axis of the rectangular fields aligned with the slope.

The built area of Forfar extends up the northern flank of Balmashanner Hill to around 110m AOD to the north-east and 140m AOD towards the south-west. This development is highly visible in the wider landscape from the west and north-west. These slopes are steep and urban extension in this direction would be highly visible. Alongside Forfar Loch, Balmashanner Hill and its network of paths is one of the settlements most important recreational assets. Paths up to and across the Hill are Core Paths and form part of the Forfar Paths Network. Panoramic views across Forfar, Forfar Loch and Strathmore are typical from the paths.

The landscape character sensitivity; visual sensitivity; and landscape value of this area are considered to be high. Accordingly, there is considered no capacity for urban extension in this direction.

6.4 Conclusion

The greatest capacity for urban extension lies to the south-west below 90m AOD. Landscape capacity is greatest on the lower ground and progressively reduces as the ground rises towards the south. The existing landscape framework of trees and hedges would help integrate development with the wider landscape.

To the north-west, the only capacity which is considered to exist would be adjacent to Forfar Academy to the north of Turfbeg. This would however involve breaching the shoulder of higher ground which characteristically contains Forfar within its shallow bowl. This is therefore considered the less preferable option for urban extension. Also, connectivity with the urban area would be poor.



6.1 View from Reid Park, Forfar



6.2 View from Newmonthill Cemetery, Forfar



6.3 View from Forfar Path Network, Balmashanner Hill



6.4A View from Forfar Path Network, Balmashanner Hill



6.4B View from Forfar Path Network, Balmashanner Hill



6.5 View from Forfar Path Network, Balmashanner Hill



6.6 View from Forfar Path Network, Balmashanner Hill



6.7 View from A926



6.8 View from A926/A90(T) Junction



6.9 Approach from A90(T) via A926 (Kirriemuir Road)



6.10 Approach from A90(T) via A929 (Glamis Road)



6.11 Approach from A90(T) via A932 (Dundee Road) at Duff's Corner



6.12 Approach from A90(T) via A932 (Dundee Road)



6.13 Approach from South-East via C56 (Lour Road)



6.14 Approach from South-East via B9128 (South Street)



6.15 Approach from East via A932 (Arbroath Road)



6.16 Approach from East via B9113 (Montrose Road)



6.17 Approach from North-East via B9134 (Lunanhead Road)



6.18 Approach from North-East via U368 (Suttieside Road)



6.19 Approach from North via B9128 (Brechin Road)

Figure 6.1 Forfar Landscape and Visual Analysis

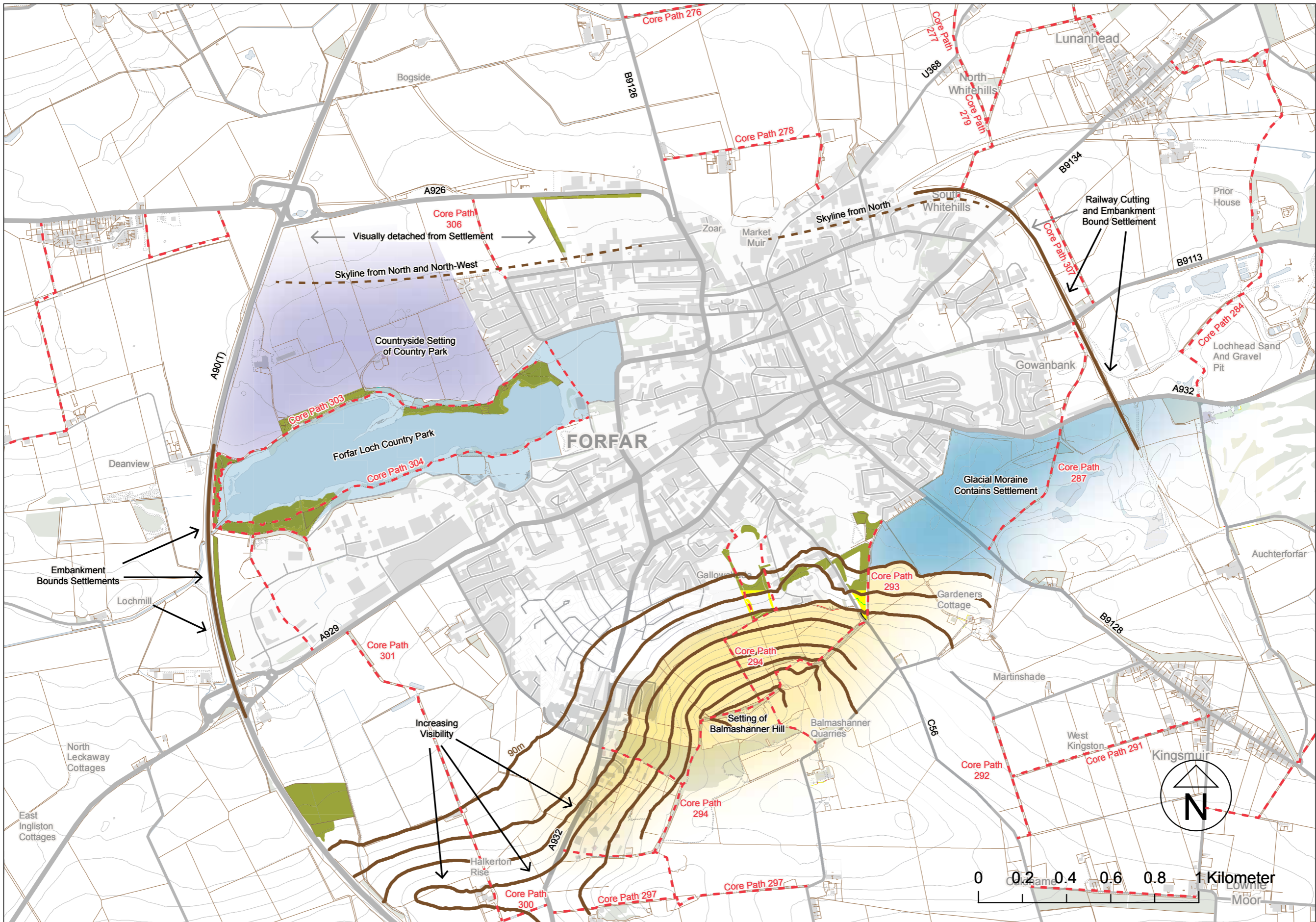


Figure 6.2 Forfar Key to Photographs

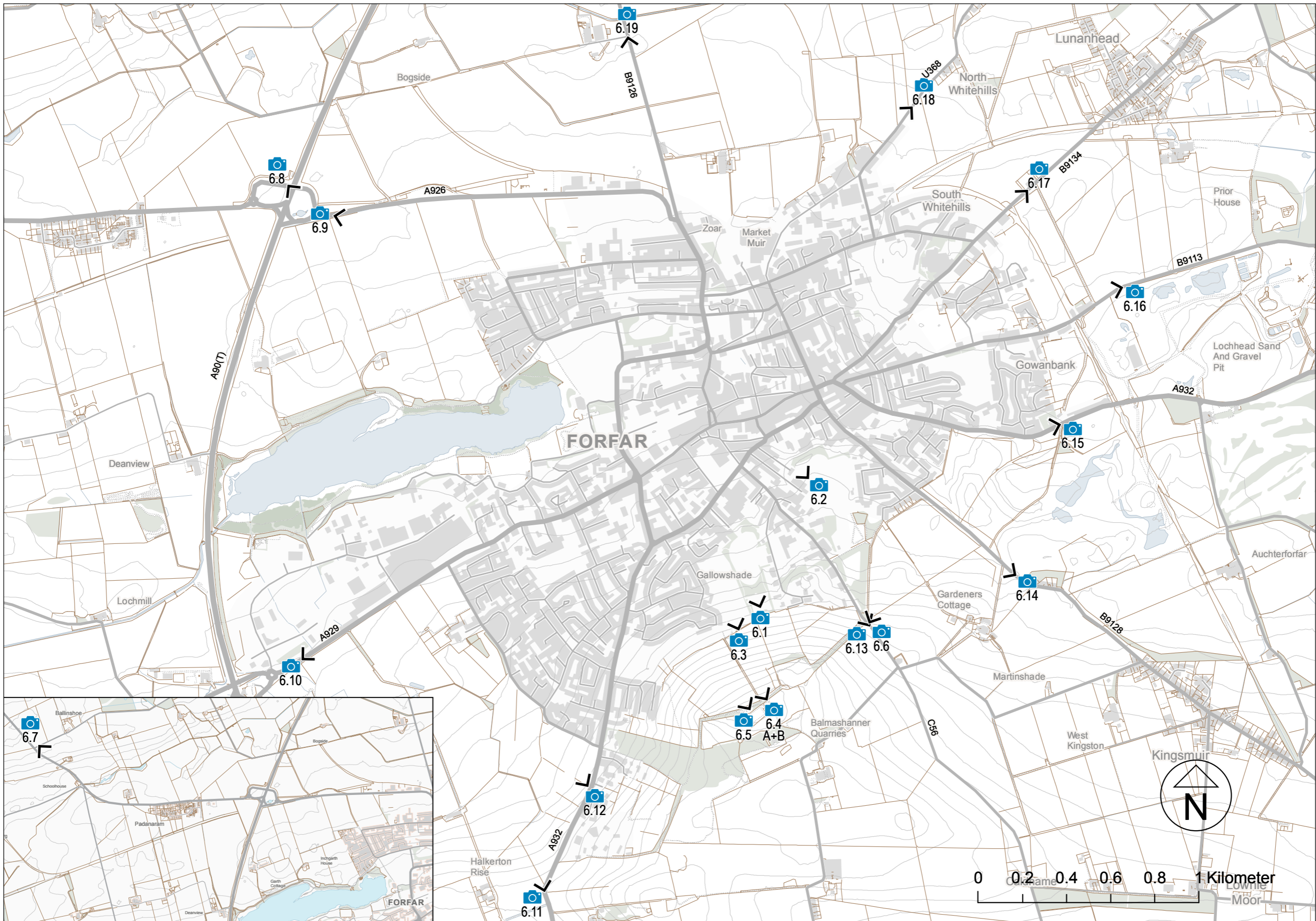


Figure 6.3 Forfar Key to Analysis of Directions of Growth

